

*God of grace, open our minds and our hearts to recognize your love and your power wherever they appear. Amen.*

Maybe you've seen the billboards, or the commercials on TV.

It's ingenious, really. A university took a well-known word and completely reversed its meaning, as a way of making their school look appealing to non-traditional students.

Many high schoolers are courted by colleges and universities for their academic prowess, their musical ability, or their skill in a particular sport. But many other potential students simply don't see college in their future. No one from their family has ever gone before. They got their GED in their 20s. They don't think they can afford college, or they also need to hold down a job. They've spent their early adulthood raising children and aren't sure about going back in middle age.

It's impossible, they might say.

But Herzing University has taken that word – impossible – and changed it into "I'm possible." The spelling is the same, but the punctuation is different, and the meaning is completely changed.

Impossible.

I'm possible.

Now, I don't actually know much about Herzing University, so please don't take this as an endorsement of their programs.

But I do think that they've got a brilliant marketing department.

It was impossible.

And then, it happens.

Yesterday I was at a beautiful ordination ceremony that embodied that sentiment – from impossible to "I'm possible."

A dear seminary friend of mine was approved for ordination before 2009 – before the decision of the ELCA to allow openly gay people to be ordained as pastors.

Chris was told that the church could find a call for him, if only he was willing to hide his sexual orientation from congregations that he might serve.

Impossible, he said.

And it cost both him and the church. Though he continued to be approved for ordination and had the support of numerous church leaders, many bishops who could have helped Chris and most congregations that met him just couldn't handle the idea of calling him as a pastor.

Impossible, they said.

But yesterday, after waiting for more than 10 years, Chris was finally ordained as a pastor in the ELCA and will be serving a congregation near Chicago.

Through the love and power of God and the persistence of one of God's servants, the impossible has finally come to pass.

That is what today's Bible stories are all about. We hear of a situation that seems impossible, and then, a prophet comes along and harnesses the power of God to accomplish an impossible thing.

Elijah gives breath to the dry bones.

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

It's impossible.

But it happened.

One of the amazing things about our faith is that it will allow us to suspend our natural sense of logic and reasoning, and believe in the impossible.

And even more amazing is that sometimes we do, indeed, witness the impossible.

The Bible is full of stories like this.

I'm not just talking about the traditional miracle stories – healings and exorcisms and whatnot. The Bible has some crazy stuff in it.

There are talking animals, for starters.

In Genesis, a serpent talks to Eve and Adam and convinces them to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

I know, you've heard that one before. You've probably already come up with some way to make sense of the talking serpent.

But have you heard the story of Balaam's donkey?

In Numbers, chapter 22, a guy named Balaam is riding his donkey when an angel tries to get his attention. Balaam doesn't see the angel, but the donkey does. So the donkey refuses to carry Balaam any further, and when Balaam gets mad and hits the donkey, it starts talking.

We all know that donkeys can't talk, at least, not outside of animated movies that also include ogres and princesses.

But there it is, right there in the Bible – it's a story of our faith.

Speaking about things that can't happen, the first thing we hear about Jesus is that his mother was a virgin when she got pregnant with him.

Well, we all know *that* is impossible.

And then, 30-some years later, Jesus dies, but he comes back to life.

That is *definitely* not possible.

In between, Jesus does a whole bunch of other miracles... but really, the virgin birth and the resurrection are quite enough to get across the point that the stories we know about Jesus simply defy all reason.

Then look at the stories about Moses. They are also full of impossible things.

There is a burning bush that is not consumed, a river that is turned to blood, and darkness that lasted for three solid days. The waters of a sea are parted so that the people can walk across on dry land, then Moses hits a rock and water comes out, and manna rains down from heaven... All of these things seem to be impossible!

That's why the Exodus story has fascinated researchers over the years – they have sought to discover logical explanations for these incredible events. The whole narrative is so unlikely that it seems naïve to take the whole thing at face value.

But that's how it's presented.

Through the power and love of God, impossible things are made possible. Simple.

And almost unbelievable.

Our faith tells us that God works through prophets – Jesus and Mary, Moses, and even Balaam's donkey – to do impossible things.

This is good news for us. It shows us that there is no limit to what God can do. God loves humanity so deeply that sometimes, God chooses to break natural law and do something impossible because that is what the people need at that moment in time.

And at least as important as God's powerful love is the fact that it can be harnessed by people. *Each one of us* has the same potential that the prophets of the Bible did.

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

Now, that was pretty awesome, and at first no one seemed to believe he could do it, but then he did.

But Jesus was also unique. He was both human and divine, so he was able to do lots of impossible things throughout the course of his ministry. It would be impractical for me to tell you to harness the power of God like Jesus did.

The stories about Mary, Moses, and Ezekiel are more relevant to us.

God chose these people – young and untrained, a criminal and refugee, a widower and political prisoner – these people who are not that different from you or me – God chose *them* to be the do-ers of the impossible.

And if God can work through Mary and Moses and Ezekiel, then why not you and me?

God's love transformed the world through these people. And God's love can transform the world through you as well. Through faithful people, God can make the impossible, possible.

Accomplishing impossible things is something that has preoccupied humanity pretty much forever. If we told the folks who lived 200 years ago that we could wake up in Paris, then board an airplane, and get to Los Angeles by bedtime – they wouldn't have believed us.

If we told our great-grandparents that we would have devices in our pockets or purses that could access the entirety of human knowledge with a few touches of the screen, they would have thought we were dreaming.

On a related note, if we told our math teachers that yes, in fact, we *would* be carrying a calculator with us at all times so maybe long division *wasn't* a necessary life skill... well, they wouldn't have wanted to believe us because that would put them out of a job!

I guess it's still a good skill to have in case the phone batteries die sometime...

Shows like Cirque du Soleil and American Ninja Warrior are popular because the performers or competitors are doing things that would be impossible for most of us.

And most of us are persistent enough that when we want to do something, but someone tells us it's impossible, that only makes us want to do it more. Isn't that what motivates some of us? We've been told that we'll never be good enough to get that job, or we'll never be strong enough to compete in that race, or we'll never be healthy enough to do the one thing that's important to us...

So we work harder or do something different and we find a way to get there. When someone tells us that our dream is not going to happen, that can be a motivator for us to turn the impossible dream into a reality.

Raising the dead? Impossible.

And yet, Jesus raised Lazarus.

Giving new life to dry bones? Impossible.

And yet, Ezekiel did so.

Liberating the slaves from Egypt? Impossible.

And yet, Moses made it happen.

Ordaining an openly gay man as a pastor? Impossible.

Yet that's what I witnessed yesterday.

Remember – *we* have the ability to make the impossible happen just as much as Moses and Mary and Ezekiel and even Jesus did.

We forget this sometimes.

Mary and Martha forgot it when they despaired over their brother's death and didn't realize that Jesus still had the ability to change things.

All of us find ourselves in those moments when we've ignored or denied the transformative power of God in the world.

But the goal is to be open to it as often as we can remember, and to recognize it when it happens.

God can work through any one of us. We all have the power to be prophets. We all have the power to change the world. We all have the ability to do the impossible.

All we have to do is believe it. And then get to work.

*God of unlikelyhoods and impossibilities, give us faith in your love and trust in your power so that we too may do unlikely and impossible things. Amen.*